

VLR-2/15/77

NRHP-1117/77

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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DATE ENTERED NOV 7 1977

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Sweet Hall

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

On the north bank of the Pamunkey River; .2 mile south of State
Route 634; approximately 1.6 miles SSW of the intersection of
State Routes 634 and 30; .4 mile SSW of Sweet Hall
(See continuation sheet # 1)☒ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Sweet Hall

☒ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First (Paul S. Tribble, Jr.)

STATE

Virginia

CODE

51

COUNTY

King William

CODE

101

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT
☒ BUILDING(S)
☐ STRUCTURE
☐ SITE
☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC
☒ PRIVATE
☐ BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
☐ IN PROCESS
☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED
☐ UNOCCUPIED
☐ WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
☐ YES: RESTRICTED
☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED
☒ NO

PRESENT USE

AGRICULTURE ☐ MUSEUM
☐ COMMERCIAL ☐ PARK
☐ EDUCATIONAL ☒ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
☐ ENTERTAINMENT ☐ RELIGIOUS
☐ GOVERNMENT ☐ SCIENTIFIC
☐ INDUSTRIAL ☐ TRANSPORTATION
☐ MILITARY ☐ OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Miss Elizabeth R. Palmer

STREET & NUMBER

Box 15h F, Sweet Hall

CITY, TOWN

West point

VICINITY OF

STATE

Virginia 23181

5 LOCATION OF =GAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

King William County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

King William

STATE

Virginia 23086

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (3) (See Continuation Sheet #1)

TITLE

(1) Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1937, 1941

☒ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington, D. C.

STATE

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT
☐ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Sweet Hall is situated on an open tract of land at a bend of the Pamunkey River in King William County. Because of its proximity to New Kent Court House a ferry was located at Sweet Hall in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Sweet Hall is a story-and-a-half, asymmetrical, T-shaped structure probably constructed late in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. It is built of brick laid in English bond throughout, except for the (south) front, which is in Flemish bond with glazed headers above the beveled water table. The water table, which is carried around the entire building, breaks about two feet from either jamb of the front entry, suggesting the former existence of an original entrance stoop, and is mitred over the head of the cellar entrance (in the east gable end of the main block), in the manner of a label mold. The house was covered with scored stucco early in the nineteenth century; this survives on most of the principal facade, and on the east wall of the ell.

The main block is five bays long with throating under the windows and possibly with jack arches above them. The nine-over-nine sash are mid-eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century replacements (the original windows were probably lead casements). A nineteenth-century porch shelters the central three bays of the facade. The gable ends have segmental arches with alternating glazed headers over the original window openings. Those on the west end were widened late in the eighteenth century and their nine-over-nine sash date from that time. Of the east end openings the southern window is an early nineteenth-century alteration; the northern one is original and has not been enlarged, but the frame dates from the mid-eighteenth-century, and the six-over-six sash in both windows are modern. The main block is crowned with a gable roof embellished with a mid-eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century modillion cornice on the front and a molded box cornice on the rear (these cover the remains of corbeled brick cornice stops). Five gabled Greek Revival dormers break the front slope; it is not presently possible to ascertain whether they replace earlier dormers. Two interior end chimneys with T-shaped stacks, small weatherings on their backs above the ridge line and elaborately molded caps surmount the main block.

The ell, which is set off-center to the east, has on its north end an asymmetrical, T-stack, pyramidal exterior chimney with a single steep tiled weathering on the east and a vertical ascent on the west. The east window on this end is not original; the west door (which leads into a small, frame, twentieth-century kitchen ell) was possibly an original window. The openings (a door and a window) in the east wall of the ell are original; of the corresponding openings in the west wall, the door has been changed to a window in the present century. A full-length, late nineteenth-century screened porch shelters the east side of the ell.

Sweet Hall has a hall-parlor-plan main block, with a single large room in the ell. Against the west wall of the ell is a Colonial Revival stair installed by the owners in the 1920s as a replacement for, and on the site of, the original enclosed stair.

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CONTINUATION SHEET # 2

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The interior woodwork of Sweet Hall dates principally from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. In the hall (west room) is a plain Greek Revival mantel with unadorned pilasters and frieze. The fireplace has been closed to accommodate a furnace flue, and the chimney breast is flanked by niches with round-headed openings. The doors, door frames, hardware and double-beaded chairboard all date from the early nineteenth century, and graining survives on the mid-nineteenth-century window jambs.

The parlor mantel is a simple mid-nineteenth-century frame with a light shelf. Flanking the fireplace are closets with fine four-panel, raised-panel doors. The north closet has an original four-panel exterior door (to the east porch) with a striking Suffolk "bean" latch.

No early trim survives in the ell room, and the fireplace has been closed.

The second floor retains a variety of original four-panel, raised-panel doors hung on unusual foliated HL hinges, except for a closet door in the east chamber that is hung on cross-garnet hinges which are not common in Virginia.

Sweet Hall's principal distinction lies in its roof structure. The ell is framed with a principal rafter-common rafter-principal butt purlin roof, which was used commonly in seventeenth-century New England houses and in large seventeenth-century Virginia houses, but rarely in the eighteenth century in Virginia. The main block is framed with an upper cruck (or curved-principal) and butt-purlin roof, a member of a family of roof types believed until recently not to exist in America. Sweet Hall is the third such roof to be discovered in America, and the first in Virginia. One rafter couple is exposed in the partition between the passage and the east chamber. Another is believed to exist in the west chamber, a comparable distance from the west gable end, but the unbroken ceiling at collar-beam level at present prevents the confirmation of this hypothesis or the inspection of the blades above the level of the collars.

No early outbuildings survive. The tombs of the builder and his son lie about 100 feet north of the house.

DJ

18 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

King William County's venerable Sweet Hall, a T-shaped, brick manor house is a highly significant example of Virginia's rare pre-Georgian architecture. Its fine brickwork, unusual plan, and surviving interior appointments would in themselves distinguish Sweet Hall; but its upper cruck, or curved-principal, roof, one of only three found in America to date, and the only one discovered in Virginia, marks the house as one of the most important architectural documents of the colonial period, one which promises to yield new information on the cultural processes and transformations of a little known period of colonial history. Probably built late in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Sweet Hall was the home first of the Claibornes and then of the Ruffin family, both prominent in the early history of Virginia.

Recent archaeological excavations and architectural discoveries in Virginia and Maryland have challenged traditional notions of "first-period" building in the Tidewater South. As a result, early building in this region has come to be recognized as a vastly more diverse phenomenon than was previously thought. Well-preserved pre-Georgian buildings such as Sweet Hall provide rare examples of the use of archaic building practices in the South, practices that were eventually abandoned because of their association with the shoddily built structures of the seventeenth century, because of the homogenization of building technology in eighteenth-century Virginia, and because of the sweeping rebuilding of rural Virginia in the early nineteenth century.

Cruck and cruck-like building construction is a case in point. Because building in America was thought to rely heavily on southeastern English practices, and because cruck construction, a northwestern English practice, was thought to have disappeared in the mid-sixteenth century, it was assumed that few, if any, such buildings were erected in America, and none at all after the first years of settlement. As recent research in America has led scholars to expect more architectural diversity students of English vernacular architecture have at the same time reinterpreted their own cruck-building tradition and have shown it to have survived, in its derivative forms, well into the eighteenth century.

Such offshoots of cruck building are considered derivative "cruck-like" forms because they do not support the entire weight of the building from ground level, as true crucks do. Rather, they are transitional between cruck forms and roofs with straight rafters. Like the former they are curved; like the latter they are supported on, rather than supporting, the vertical walls.

See Continuation Sheet #3

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CONTINUATION SHEET #3

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Upper crucks are one of several cruck-like forms. Upper crucks in England are typically found in masonry buildings and surviving examples date from the early seventeenth century through the fourth decade of the eighteenth century. Sweet Hall fits these criteria. It represents, as the English examples do, an advance from a poorer housing standard to a much higher, but still modest, one. That the house is called a "Hall," like Ocean Hall, a Maryland upper-cruck house, and like the better English upper crucks, is an accurate reflection of its status. Sweet Hall was the home of a well-to-do but not audaciously wealthy provincial family; it was the equivalent of a small manor house.

Because the King William County records were among those most severely decimated by nineteenth-century disasters, the complete documentation of Sweet Hall is not possible. However, it is certain that the Sweet Hall lands first belonged to the Claiborne family. Lt. Col. Thomas Claiborne (1647-1683), (the son of William Claiborne (1587-1676), Secretary of the colony and a major figure in the mid-seventeenth-century politics of Virginia and Maryland) patented land in King William County (then New Kent County) in 1655 and again in 1677. By the time of his death the family was established at its principal plantation, Romancoke, where Col. Claiborne was buried. His son Capt. Thomas Claiborne (1680-1732) apparently settled at Sweet Hall late in the seventeenth or early in the eighteenth century. A figure of some local importance, Capt. Claiborne was an original landholder in Dillaware Town (now West Point). In 1720 at about the time that he built Sweet Hall the General Assembly authorized Claiborne to operate a ferry "from Sweet Hall . . . to mouth of Tanks Queen's Creek," authority which was reconfirmed to his heirs in 1748 as permission to run a ferry "from Sweet Hall to Claiborn Gooch's."

Capt. Claiborne was buried a few feet north of the present house. His tomb has survived as has that of his son Thomas Claiborne, Jr. (1704-1735), clerk of Stafford County. Nineteenth-century sources also claim that the elder Claiborne's second wife, Anne Fox (1684-1735), is buried in the same lot.

At Claiborne's death his son Nathaniel Claiborne "of Sweet Hall" (d. ca. 1756) inherited the property; he, and later his widow, continued to operate the ferry. Subsequently, Robert Ruffin, two of whose daughters had married Claibornes, came into possession of the plantation. In December 1773 he advertised in the Virginia Gazette "by virtue of a deed in trust from Mr. Roger Gregory to ROBERT RUFFIN," "SWEETHALL, A Very pleasant situation on Pamunkey river with about 400 acres of high LAND, and several hundred acres of valuable marsh," to be sold at auction at King William Court House. Apparently Ruffin himself (who owned two other important plantations: Mayfield in Dinwiddie County and Rich Neck in Surry County) purchased or repurchased the property, for he and his heirs owned it until the early nineteenth century.

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In 1801 James Ruffin, "residing at Sweet Hall," insured the property with the Mutual Assurance Society. The "Dwelling house" and "Wing" (ell) were valued at \$2000 "after the Deduction of One thousand Dollars for decay or bad repair." The property was reinsured by Ruffin's heirs in 1805 at \$2500 less \$500 for the same reasons. A wooden porch had been added to the east side of the ell supplementing the full-length "Wooden Piazza" at the front of the house which had first appeared in the earlier policy.

Sweet Hall was sold before 1816 to William George Vidal who reinsured it in that year for \$2000 with "nothing" deducted for bad repair. This suggests that the Federal detailing, notably the doors and trim and some of the windows and sash on the first floor, along with the exterior stucco, were installed during repairs between 1805 and 1816.

Vidal (or Videlle) is reported to have "committed suicide in one of the rear chambers" and in 1829 "Claiborn Hall on the Pamunkey" was advertised for sale in the Richmond Enquirer. It was subsequently acquired by Capt. Sterling Lipscombe and then by his son-in-law R. T. Puller who owned the property in 1897. The Palmer family, the present owners, purchased Sweet Hall in 1924.

DJ/MTP

10. Sweet Hall

The original owners of Sweet Hall, the Claibornes, were prominent in the early history of Virginia. Capt. Thomas Claiborne, Jr., b. 1680, d. 1732, inherited the Sweet Hall tract while he was still a minor. On September 5, 1722, he was issued a new patent for the Sweet Hall tract containing 1800 acres described as part of the Grand Patent of 5,000 acres granted to Col. William Claiborne in 1659. New patents were often issued to correct lines and establish boundaries between property owners, not only to acquire new land. Early patents were often inexact. (Harris, p. 594) In 1720 Claiborne was authorized to operate a ferry "from Sweet Hall ... to the mouth of Tank's Queen's Creek" in New Kent, and a ferry continued to be operated here well into the nineteenth century. (Henings Statutes, Vol. IV, p. 93 and Vol. VI, p. 17.) The combination of the authorization for the ferry and the reissue of the patent suggest that Thomas Claiborne, Jr. decided to establish his seat and build a substantial dwelling about this time. It is now owned by the Palmer family.

USGS 7.5' quadrangle
New Kent, Va.

(scale: 1:24000)
1965

SWEET HALL, KING WILLIAM COUNTY, VIRGINIA

UTM References:

- A - 18/332180/4160030
- B - 18/332180/4159140
- C - 18/331640/4159500
- D - 18/331560/4159760
- E - 18/332000/4160040

